

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 5-AWASHINGTON TIMES
30 May 1985

Defense drug testing plan seen as security safeguard

By Walter Andrews
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The Defense Department yesterday authorized the military services to begin urinalysis testing for drug abuse among civilian employees in critical jobs to guard against the disclosure of secret information by drug-related blackmail.

The services already have a testing program for military personnel, which has been criticized in the past. The new policy, which goes into effect Monday was created because abuse among civilian personnel poses the same threat to national security, spokesman Maj. Pete Wyro said.

A 1982 worldwide survey done for the Pentagon by a contractor showed that abuse varied in that different types of drugs are used by different age groups, he said. No difference in use was shown between civilians and military personnel, however.

The new policy is "permissive" in that the military services are free to implement it or not, the spokesman said. It is anticipated that it will take the military services several months to write and implement the testing programs, he said.

In addition to 2.15 million active duty personnel, the Defense Department employs about 1.1 million civilians, but Pentagon officials said they could not predict how many civilians might ultimately be affected by the new policy.

Maj. Wyro said he did not know how many of civilian employees would be listed as "critical" by the services and come under the test program.

At least one union representing civilian employees said it opposed the tests.

The military services must still obtain approval from the Office of the Secretary of Defense for the method of conducting the tests and for the lists of critical jobs, the spokesman said.

This would be the first time drug abuse testing was applied to federal government civilian employees outside of law enforcement agencies, Maj. Wyro said.

The tests, according to Maj. Wyro, will be used to:

- Identify drug abusers and notify them of the availability of counseling and medical treatment.
- Assist the military services to determine fitness for appointment

to a critical job.

- Assist national security by identifying people whose drug abuse could cause disruption of operations, destruction of property, threats to themselves and others, or the potential for unwarranted disclosure of classified information through drug-related blackmail.

"We're aware of this and we shudder at it," said Jim Jones, a labor relations specialist with the American Federation of Government Employees. "It's just part of a drift that we've seen into constitutional areas of privacy that really worries us."

"If there was a legitimate interest or problem here, for example in the area of national security, we'd be all for it," Mr. Jones said. "But this is scary. We don't know of anybody else doing this. We don't know how broad this is going to be. And there's no scientifically valid reason that we can see to assume that these urinalysis tests are always accurate."

Urinalysis testing of military personnel was stopped in the 1970s because civilian courts challenged the methods used on legal grounds, Maj. Wyro said. It was resumed in 1981, with the program being modified in 1983 and again in 1984.

In 1983, it was found that some members of the military had been improperly discharged from service because of faulty urinalysis testing procedures.